

HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN

OLD CITY HALL

HA-41 (OCH)

202 and 222 N. Alabama Street
Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana

A PART OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR MARION COUNTY, INDIANA

Adopted by the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission
February 1, 2017

Adopted by the Metropolitan Development Commission
February 15, 2017

Prepared By:

Staff of the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission
1842 City-County Building
200 East Washington Street
Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana

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OLD CITY HALL

Historic Preservation Plan

I. OWNER¹

The City of Indianapolis
200 E. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

II. HISTORIC & ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN ANALYSIS

Construction Information

- Date of original design, construction, or origin: 1909-1910
- Architects: Rubush and Hunter
- Engineer: George M. Brill, Supervising Engineer
- Builder: Westlake Construction Company

Physical Description²

The Old City Hall is located on the northwest corner of Ohio and Alabama Streets, four blocks northeast of Monument Circle. The building itself occupies an area of approximately 190 x 115 feet. The longest side contains the main entrance and faces east onto Alabama Street.

The four-story-and-basement structure was constructed of hard-burned brick, faced with large slabs of Indiana Bedford limestone and has a granite foundation. All sides of the building, even those facing the alley to the west or the area to the north, are equally well finished.

The parking lot that extends to the north of the Old City Hall has contained businesses, residences, and parking facilities. According to aerial photography, the last commercial building on this site was demolished before 1986.

III. HISTORIC AREA DELINEATION & LEGAL DESCRIPTION³

The historic area is comprised of two parcels of land which are part of Lots 1 through 6 of Square 38 of the Donation Lands of the City of Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana, and part of vacated Miami Street:

- (1) Parcel 1029552 (commonly known as 222 N. Alabama Street) 135FT E END L1 L2 & L3 EX 37FT X 28FT W END & VAC ALLEY S & ADJ SQ38 CONT 0.650AC+-
- (2) Parcel 1097670 (commonly known as 202 N. Alabama Street) 135FT E END L4 THRU L6 & 37FT X 28FT SW COR L3 SQ38 CONT 0.659AC+-

¹ From the records of the Center Township Assessor's Office on November 3, 2016.

² Adapted from the "Old Indianapolis City Hall" National Register of Historic Places nomination form prepared by Mary Jane Meeker and Eric Gilbertson on June 12, 1974.

³ Adapted from a Quitclaim Deed, Instrument Number 2002-0122907, on file with the Marion County Recorder's Office, June 25, 2002.

- (3) Miami Street was vacated per Resolution Number 77-VAC-17 as recorded in the Marion County Recorder's Office in Instrument Number 770081995.

The consolidated boundary of the historic area can be described as follows:

Beginning at the intersection of the north right-of-way line of E. Ohio Street and the west right-of-way line of N. Alabama Street, which is the POINT OF BEGINNING, thence N 87° 59' 37" W 134.5 feet along the north right-of-way line of E. Ohio Street, thence N 2° 3' 47" E 419.8' to the south right-of-way line of E. New York Street, thence S 87° 59' 14" E 134.1 feet to the west right-of-way line of N. Alabama Street, thence S 2° 0' 28" W 419.9 feet along the west right-of-way line of N. Alabama Street to the POINT OF BEGINNING; containing 1.29 acres, or 56,428.7 square feet, more or less, subject to rights-of-way easements, and restrictions.

This boundary is depicted in Section VII of this historic area plan.

NOTE: This preservation plan expressly identifies and **designates the interior of Old City Hall** as having exceptional historic and architectural significance.

IV. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The Old City Hall is architecturally and culturally significant to the City of Indianapolis. Throughout its history, it has housed city government, the Indiana State Museum, and the Indianapolis-Marion County Interim Central Library. It has provided the citizens of Marion County a space in which to conduct public business, to learn about state history, conduct research, and pursue literary interests. The Beaux Arts structure was designed by Rubush and Hunter, one of Indianapolis' most prominent architectural firms, and provided office space to city agencies for more than half a century.

In 2003, The ROSK Group, Inc. completed an initial reuse feasibility study for the Old City Hall. The study concluded that it appeared feasible to preserve and reuse the historic structure to meet community needs.⁴

Architectural Significance⁵

The Old City Hall is considered one of the finest examples of early-twentieth-century public buildings in the area. The exterior is a clear illustration of the classical Beaux Arts style. The interior exemplifies what was considered the height of decorative art at the time of its construction. At its cornerstone ceremony, Mayor Bookwalter stated, "The design speaks for itself. The interior finish, the exterior workmanship—every detail represents the highest degree of the builder's art."⁶ The quality of construction is evidenced by the fine condition and usefulness of the building today.

⁴ The ROSK Group, Inc, "Initial Feasibility Study and Programming Developments for Conversion and Renovations at Former Interim Central Library—IMCPL (Old City Hall) Indianapolis, Indiana," on file with the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, July 3, 2003.

⁵ Much of this section, unless noted otherwise, is adapted from the "Old Indianapolis City Hall" National Register of Historic Places nomination form prepared by Mary Jane Meeker and Eric Gilbertson on June 12, 1974.

⁶ "Lays Corner Stone of New City Hall," newspaper clipping on file with the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, 28 July 1909.

The building retains much of its original building materials, as well as a relatively intact floor plan. Most of the exterior architectural details are extant, although the structure has been compromised by the infill of its window openings when it was converted to a museum use. Most of the original interior finishes and works of art are also intact, including those found in the grand, central rotunda. The building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

The Old City Hall is an adaptation of the classical Ionic order by the premier Indianapolis architectural firm of Rubush and Hunter, which won a design competition to be awarded the commission.⁷ The firm began its successful partnership just a few years prior to the construction of the Old City Hall.⁸ Preston C. Rubush and Edgar O. Hunter changed the built environment of downtown Indianapolis in the early-twentieth century, designing such landmark buildings as:

- Circle Theater (1916), Monument Circle
- Murat Temple Addition (1922), Massachusetts Avenue
- Columbia Club (1925), Monument Circle
- Indiana Theater (1927), Washington Street
- Circle Tower (1930), Monument Circle
- Coca-Cola Bottling Plant (1931), Massachusetts Avenue
- Art Deco façade for the H. P. Wasson and Company Department Store (1936), Washington Street.

The decoration is typical of Beaux Arts buildings. The first floor has three double bronze doors with bronze torchiers at the sides. These are framed with low pediments and carved lotus buds on the lintels. The second and third stories have recessed Roman Doric engaged columns banded at the top by an egg-and-dart motif. The columns are topped by a square abacus. A simple architrave with disks spaced over each column decorates the frieze while a continuous dentil runs under the cornice topped with an egg-and-dart motif. The fourth floor attic conceals a low, flat roof.

Entering through a marble-columned lobby, the floors of all lobbies and corridors in the structure are inlaid with colored marble, while the walls have marble wainscoting panels and pilasters. Columns in the rotunda area are scagliola matching the antique verde bases. Much of the original mahogany woodwork is still visible in many areas. The rotunda stretches eighty-five feet above the lobby and is capped by a magnificent 750-square-foot stained glass dome typical of the “Tiffany Era.” Wreaths with acorns, peaches, and other ripe fruit entwine themselves among the geometrical pattern of a bewildering array of multi-colored glass. Light streaming through the dome casts a soft glow throughout the center and balconies on each floor. The center of the rotunda floor features an inlaid compass rose design in marble. From each of the balconies one can sense the feeling of immense space inspiring a sense of pure visual delight within the building.

The Cincinnati art firm of William F. Behrens was commissioned to provide all of the murals decorating the interior at a cost of \$23,700.^{9,10} Each has simulated gold backgrounds with animal

⁷ *Souvenir of the Opening and Dedication of the City Hall, Indianapolis, Indiana*, brochure on file at the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, 1910.

⁸ Glory-June Greiff, “Rubush and Hunter,” in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, ed. David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 333-334.

⁹ “Buys Art for City Hall,” newspaper clipping on file with the IHPC Office, date unknown, c.1910.

¹⁰ Assuming this price was set in 1910, this amount is valued at \$1,260,000.00 in 2015 US dollars according to www.measuringworth.com (accessed January 25, 2017).

symbols of the zodiac. Heavily-laden wreaths of fruits, flowers, and ribbons include heads of chaste maidens having sweet smiles and downcast eyes.

From 1964 to 1966, under the direction of James Associates of Indianapolis, the state invested nearly a million dollars to renovate the building for museum purposes. The exterior was cleaned and repointed and all window openings were sealed except in the third floor office area. Interior surfaces were cleaned or painted. Ceilings in the exhibit areas were lowered to permit installation of air conditioning, humidity controls, and additional wiring. Paneling and a traffic-resistant floor covering were installed in all exhibit areas. In spite of the sealed windows, much of the original architectural character remains. Inside, the tremendous enclosed space bespeaks of another era. More recent additions to the exterior of the building are two carved limestone eagles that flank the entry stairs. They were removed from the famed Interurban Traction Terminal (1904-1968) and given to the Indiana State Museum in 1968.

Historical Significance¹¹

After sixty years of leasing office space to house city government, Indianapolis Mayor Charles A. Bookwalter proposed to build a city hall for Indianapolis in 1907.¹² The new city hall's cornerstone was laid on July 27, 1909, later inscribed with the words of Governor Thomas R. Marshall: "I am, myself, a citizen of no mean city."¹³ The Governor also said of the new city hall that, "It should stand for more than a pile of brick and stone and mortar; it should stand for the ideal of citizenship and office-holding in this community."¹⁴ The building was dedicated just a year and a half later on December 21, 1910; its construction symbolized the "coming of age" of Indianapolis as a major midwestern metropolis. The total cost of the building, exclusive of ground and portable fixtures, was \$699,239.83.¹⁵ The building was opened to the public with great fanfare that included the Indianapolis Military Band, a speech by Governor Marshall, and speeches by six former mayors, including Bookwalter.¹⁶ Despite its rapid construction, the building served the people of Indianapolis for over half a century until city offices were moved to the new City-County Building in 1963.

The State of Indiana began leasing the structure in 1963. Major interior and exterior renovations costing nearly a million dollars were made under the direction of James Associates of Indianapolis to accommodate the Indiana State Museum. The Museum opened its doors in January 1967 and the State of Indiana purchased the building from the City of Indianapolis in 1973.¹⁷ The museum occupied the building until May 2002, when it moved into its new facility at the White River State Park and the city regained ownership.

The building then housed the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library until September 2007, while renovations and additions were made to the library's facility.

¹¹ Much of this section is adapted from the "Old Indianapolis City Hall" National Register of Historic Places nomination form prepared by Mary Jane Meeker and Eric Gilbertson on June 12, 1974.

¹² *Background Information*, factsheet on file at the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, c.2000.

¹³ This phrase originates with Paul of Tarsus. "Motto in City Hall Cornerstone Stirs Controversy Over Meaning," *Indianapolis Times*, 4 March 1962.

¹⁴ "Lays Corner Stone of New City Hall," newspaper clipping on file with the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, 28 July 1909.

¹⁵ This sum is equal to approximately \$19 million in 2016 dollars according to www.measuringworth.com

¹⁶ *Souvenir of the Opening and Dedication of the City Hall, Indianapolis, Indiana*, brochure on file at the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, 1910.

¹⁷ *The Indiana State Museum...Biography of a Building*, brochure on file at the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, c.1982.

V. PRESERVATION OBJECTIVES

1. Preserve the Old City Hall's interior and exterior features.
2. Encourage adaptive reuse of the Old City Hall and development of the surrounding historic area that retains and preserves the exterior and interior features of the Old City Hall building.
3. Encourage restoring and reopening Old City Hall's window openings.
4. Encourage any addition, pedestrian connector, or other attachment that connects the Old City Hall to any development of the surrounding historic area to:
 - a. Connect to either the north or west elevations; thereby avoiding the elevations that face E. Ohio Street or N. Alabama Street (the main façade).
 - b. Respectfully fit within an existing opening (or discernible but enclosed opening) such that, if the attachment is removed, the affected elevation of the Old City Hall will not be substantially altered. If building codes require a proposed addition, connector, or other attachment to widen or otherwise change the area surrounding a historic opening, these changes should be respectful of the original portions, materials, and details.
 - c. Avoid obscuring or damaging exterior or interior features of the Old City Hall.
5. Encourage new development within the historic area that complements the character-defining features of the Old City Hall.

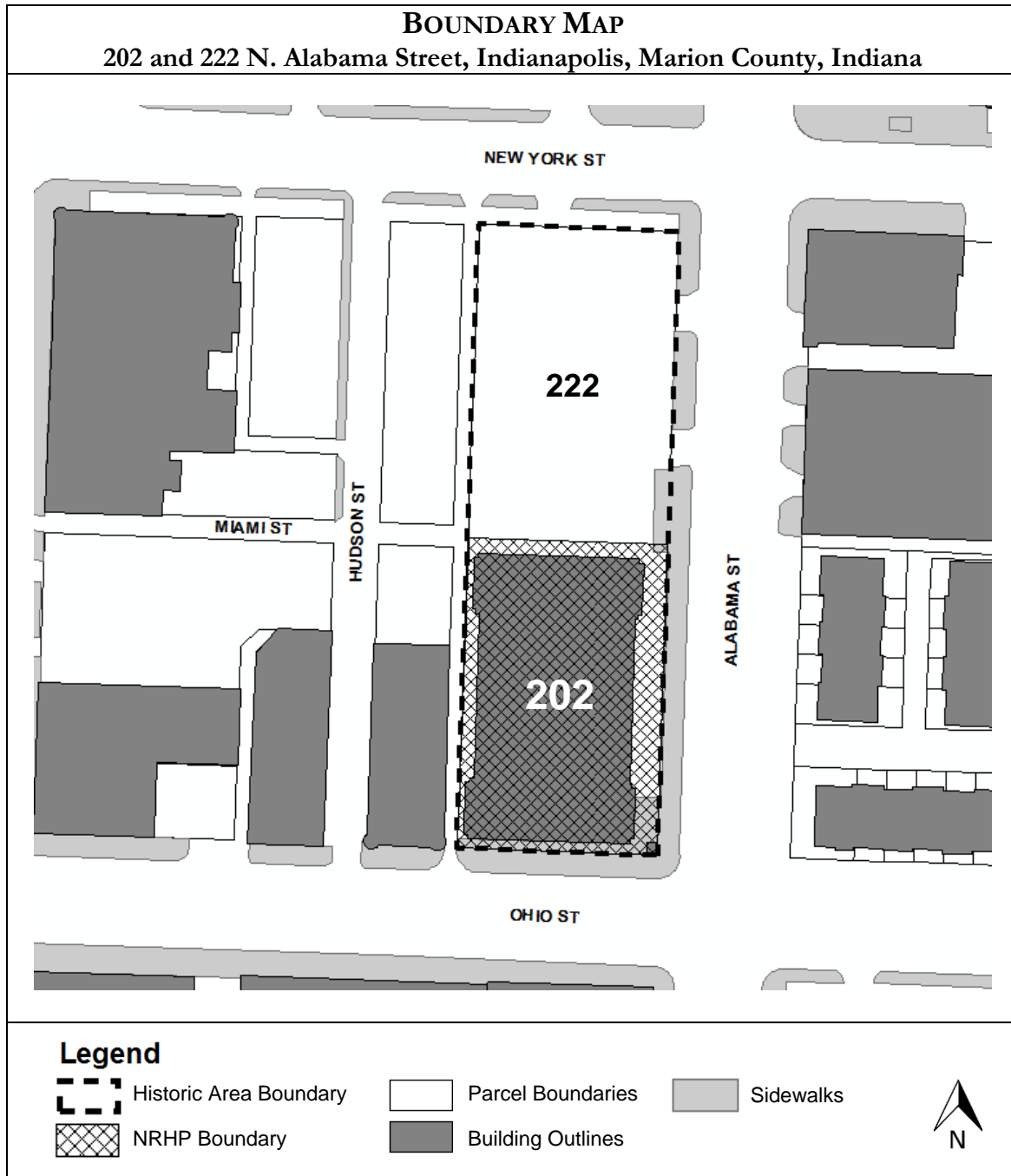
VI. PRESERVATION CRITERIA

- A. Any development, construction, reconstruction, restoration, or alteration of the subject structure's interior, exterior, or site shall be appropriate to the property's historic and architectural values and significance.
- B. Any development, construction, reconstruction, restoration, or alteration to the exterior shall be visually compatible and appropriate in function, general design, arrangement, color, texture, and materials to the design and character of the historic area.
- C. The IHPC shall use the *Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: With Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitation, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Buildings*¹⁸ to determine appropriateness when it reviews and makes decisions regarding development, construction, reconstruction, preservation, restoration, alteration, and demolition in the historic area.

¹⁸ Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer, *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: With Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitation, Restoring, & Reconstructing Historic Buildings*, Diane Publishing Co., 1995.

VII. IDENTIFICATION AND DESIGNATION OF HISTORIC AREA

The property at 202 and 222 N. Alabama Street, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana is hereby identified and designated as an Indianapolis Historic Landmark. **Note:** This historic area plan expressly identifies and **designates the interior of Old City Hall**.



This plan has been prepared in accordance with the State Statute IC 36-7-11.1, which establishes and empowers the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission. After the approval of this plan by the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission and its adoption by the Metropolitan Development Commission as part of the Marion County Comprehensive Plan, the provisions and requirements of IC 36-7-11.1 and this plan apply to all property and structures within the delineated area.

VIII. PHOTOGRAPHS & MAPS

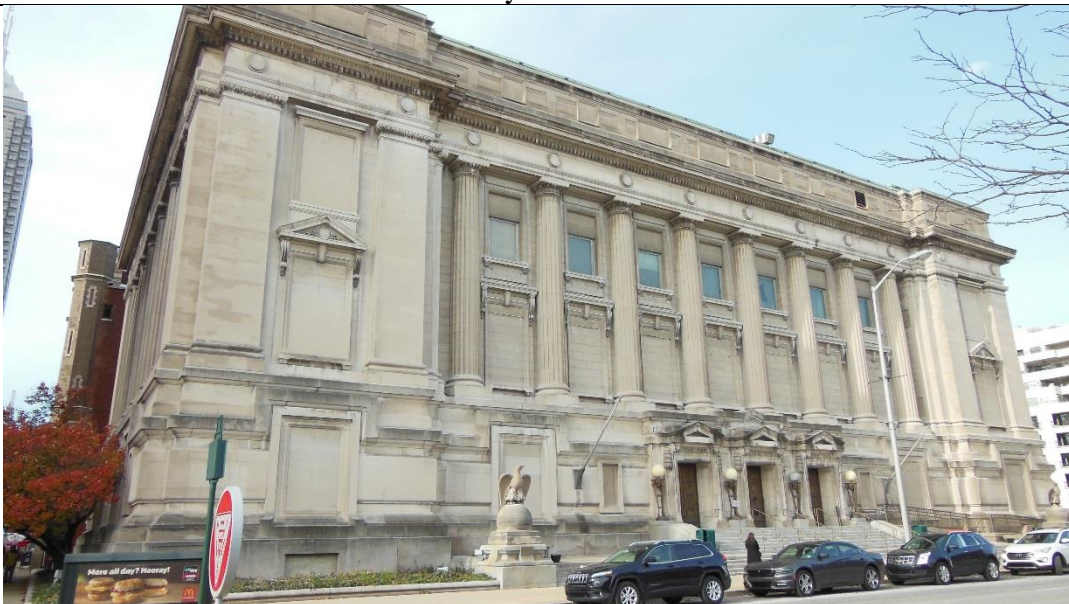
HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPH, C.1910

Photo courtesy of the Bass Photo Collection, Indiana Historical Society

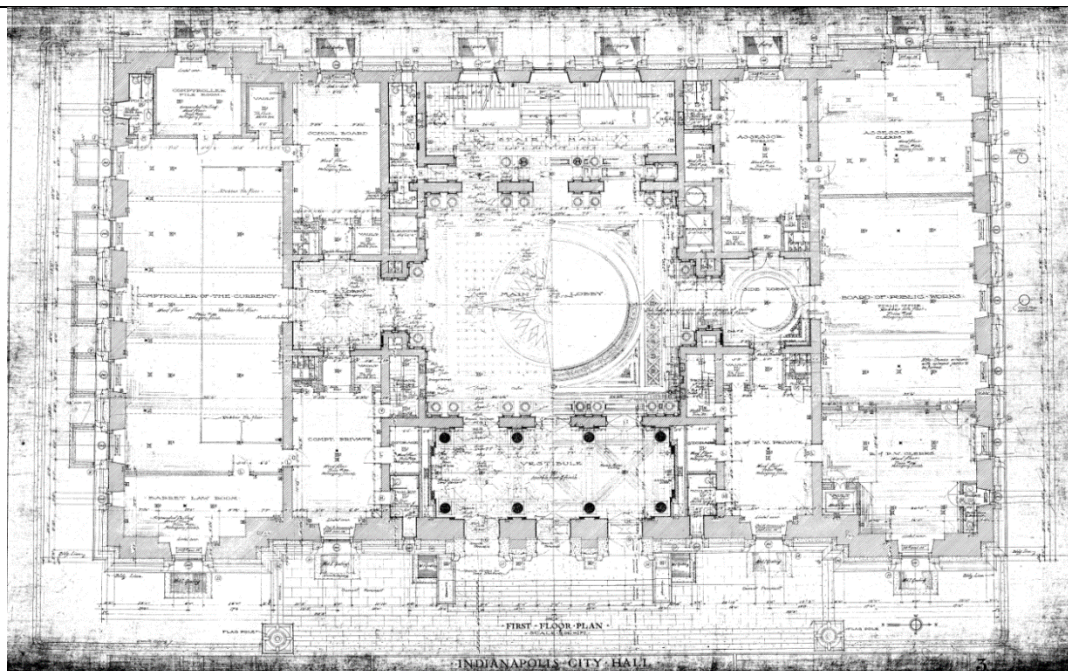


EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPH, NOVEMBER 2016

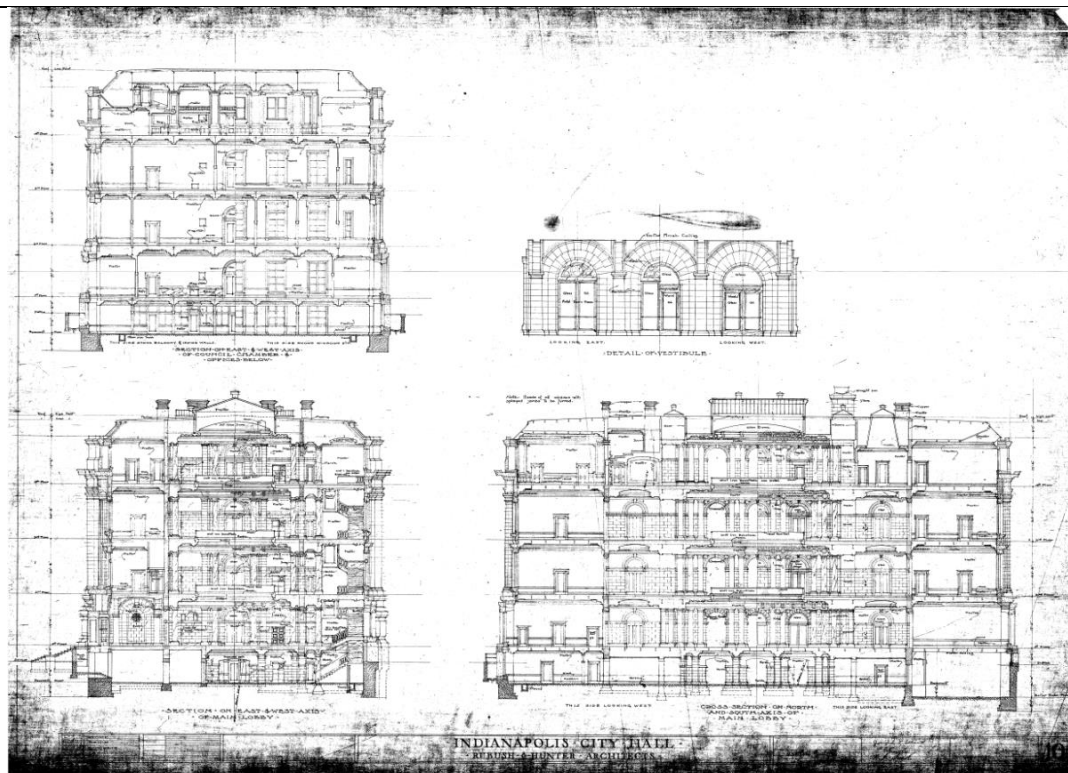
Photo by IHPC Staff



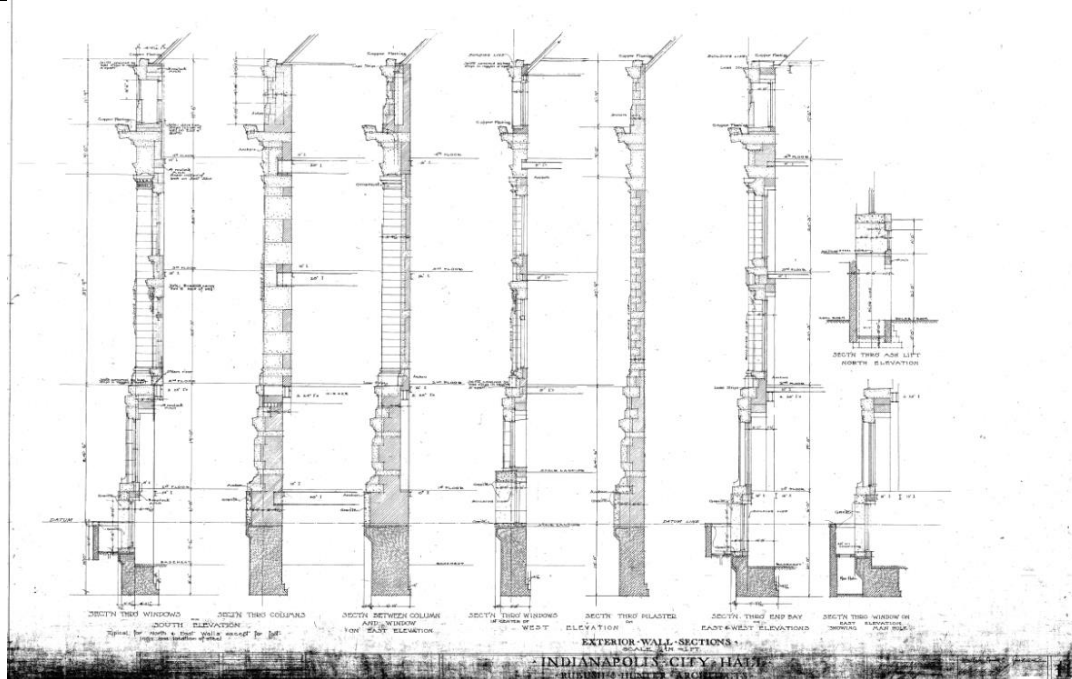
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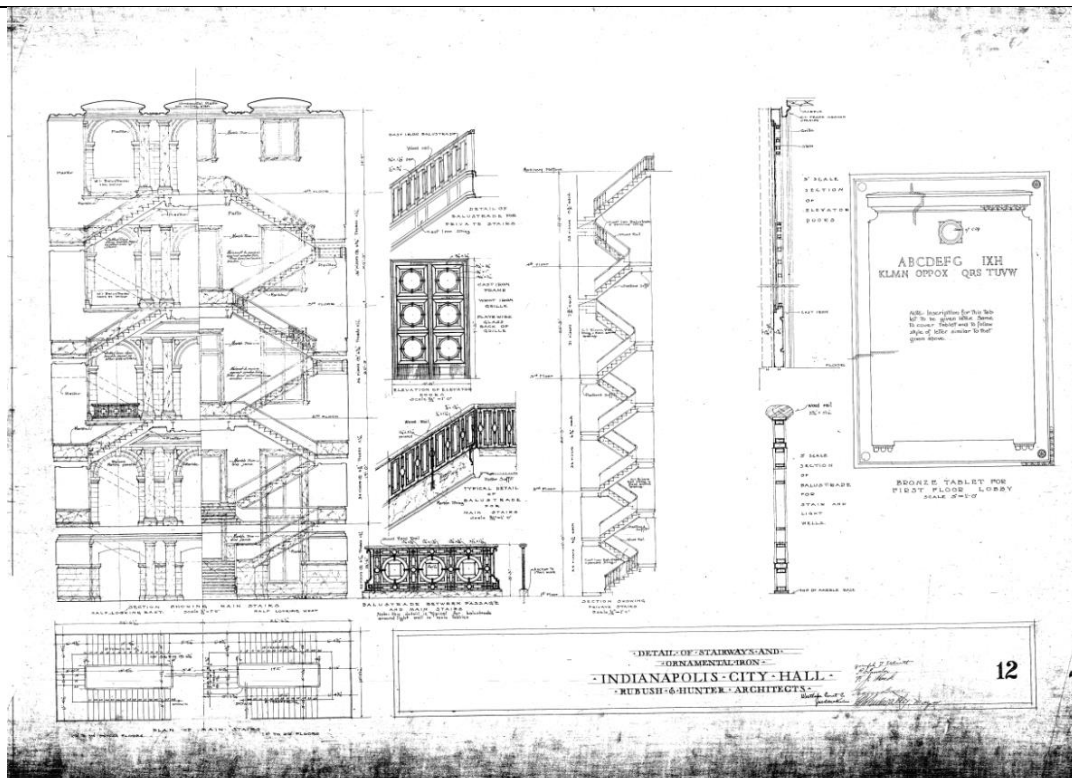
SCAN OF ORIGINAL PLANS INTERIOR WALL SECTIONS



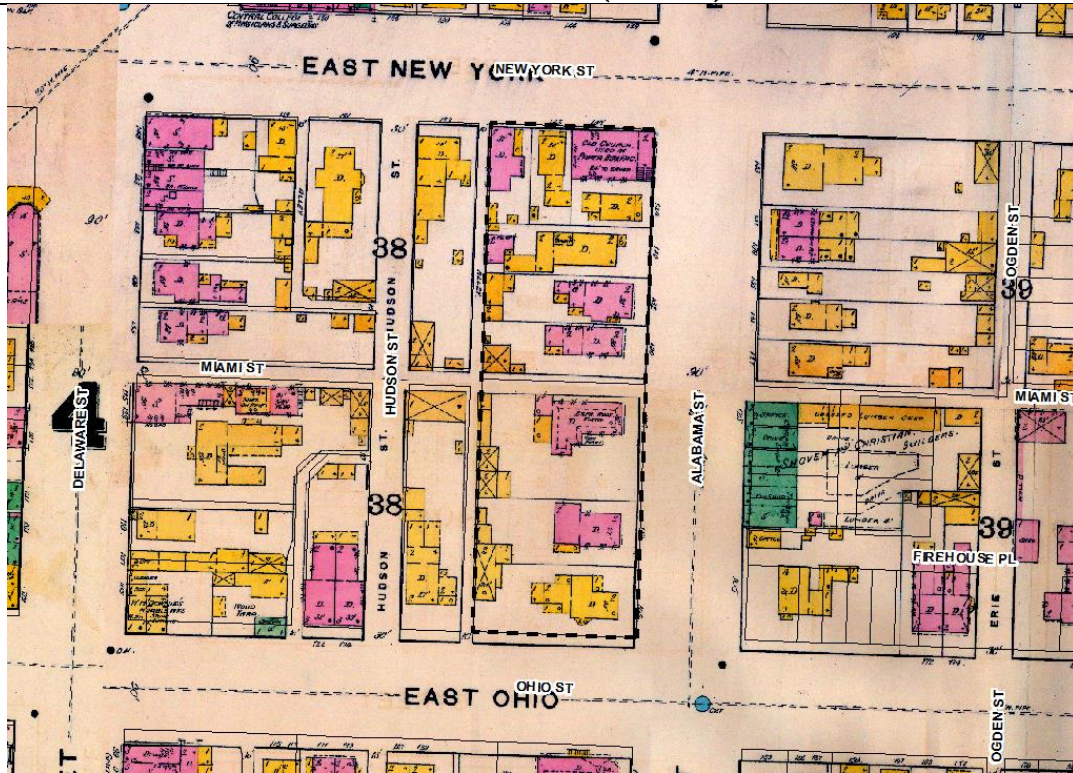
SCAN OF ORIGINAL PLANS EXTERIOR WALL SECTIONS



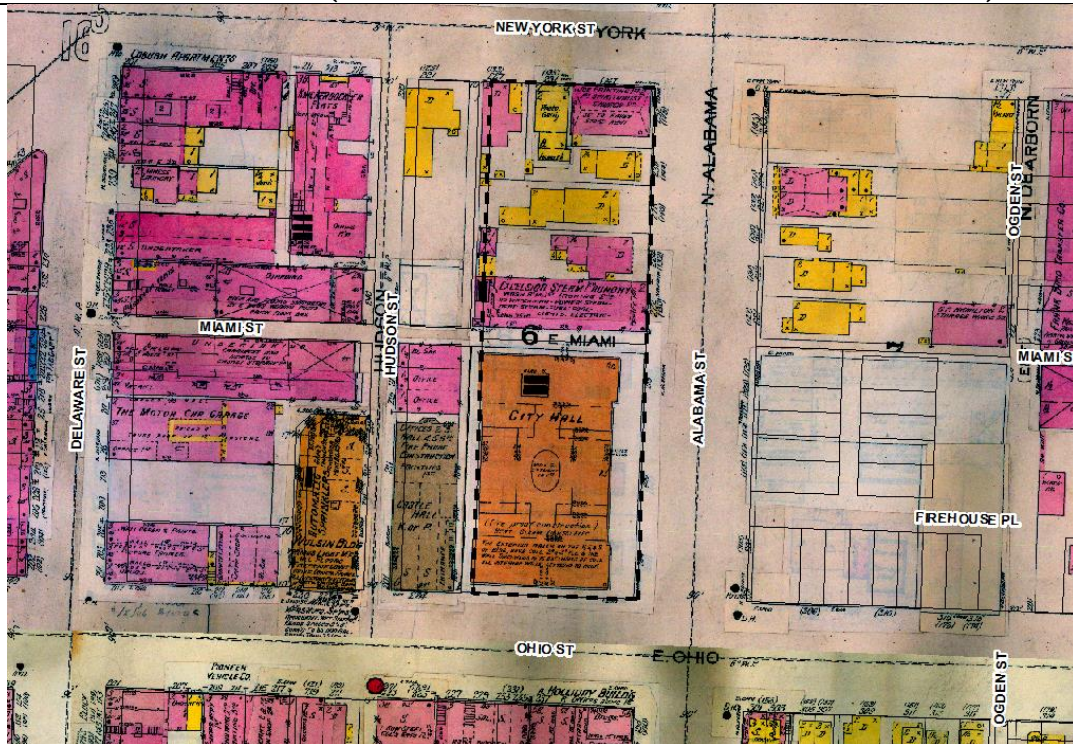
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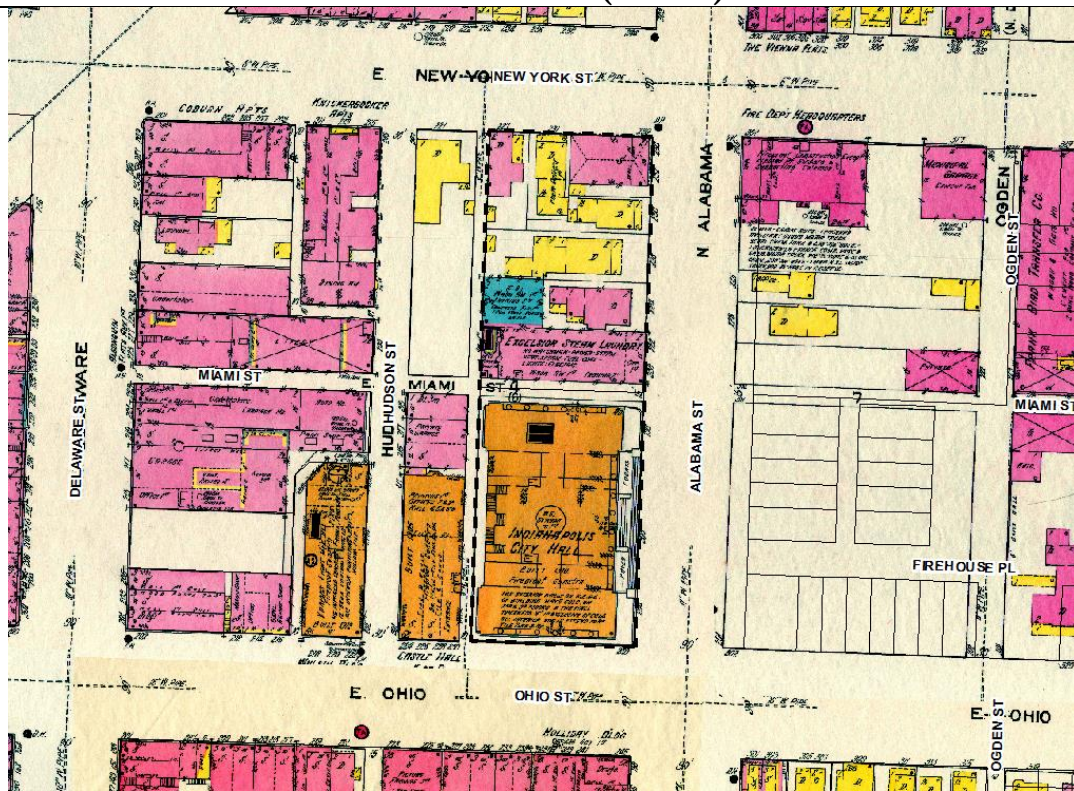
SANBORN MAP (C. 1887)



SANBORN MAP (C. 1898 BASE MAP UPDATED THROUGH 1910)



SANBORN MAP (C. 1915)



INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS, APRIL 2011
Photos by IHPC Staff

